Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 07-49-207
Week of December 3, 2007

SOIL DISTURBANCE CAN INCREASE ANTHRAX RISK

Cattle producers considering improvements that will result in excavation in certain pasture areas are being advised to strongly consider vaccinating their herd for anthrax before going ahead.

"Anthrax spores come from the soil, and disturbance means higher risk for livestock in the immediate area," said Bob Drysdale, Resource Management Specialist with the Lands Branch of Saskatchewan Agriculture.

Saskatchewan Agriculture closely monitors disease and environmental conditions across the province to maintain optimal health and range conditions for its Saskatchewan Pastures Program (SPP). The program comprises some 54 community pastures representing 846,000 acres of grassland. The program serves approximately 2,500 patrons, who graze 125,000 cattle and calves.

"After the anthrax outbreak in 2006, SPP regional managers required cattle in anthrax risk areas to be vaccinated before entering the pastures this spring," Drysdale said. "By working proactively with the Pasture Patron Advisory Committees, SPP came through the 2007 pasture season without any anthrax-related cases, even with the repeated wet conditions in northeastern Saskatchewan this summer."

In late August, the pasture program was advised by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency of an anthrax case in Cherry Grove, Alberta, near Cold Lake. Pasture managers were immediately notified of the risk, with an extra caution for the Beacon Hill and Bluebell Pastures just across the border from Cherry Grove.

"The basis of the Cherry Grove incident was traced to excavation," said Drysdale. "Since there was a case near Lloydminster in May and one near Bonneville the previous summer, this indicated a risk for anthrax in the northeastern area of Alberta. This case has real implications for SPP and livestock producers in risk areas of Saskatchewan."

With the risk ever-present, and the potentially devastating consequences for producers of any large-scale anthrax outbreak, Saskatchewan Agriculture is urging caution and the incorporation of prevention into plans for pasture improvements.

"If producers are planning excavation work such as buildings, dugouts and water pipelines, they should consider vaccinating if there have been anthrax cases in their areas," said Drysdale.

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"Talk to your local veterinarian about anthrax. Their knowledge of conditions in your region will help decide whether vaccinating for anthrax is appropriate for your situation. With the herd out of the pasture for winter, now is the time to consider vaccination, before excavations begin in the spring."

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A NATURAL FIT SUGGESTS BRIGHT FUTURE FOR CAN PRO

Can Pro Ingredients Ltd. Of Arborfield is currently taking the necessary steps to establish the first commercial implementation of a new canola processing technology. The technology was made possible through acquisitions deemed a natural fit for the company.

After the recent acquisition of business assets and operations of Arborfield Dehy Ltd. (ADL) and licensing of proprietary canola processing technology from MCN Bioproducts Inc. (MCN), Can Pro Ingredients Ltd. Is in the process of transforming ADL's existing alfalfa processing plant into a multi-product processing facility.

"The acquisition was necessary to provide the base for the production facility," explained Todd Lahti, President and CEO of Can Pro Ingredients. "We acquired these assets and now we are expanding the production facilities that exist there, so it was a faster route than starting from scratch."

He says the combined operations are larger, more diversified, and more flexible than either alone.

"Arborfield Dehy Ltd. Has been operating the alfalfa business since the early 1970s, so when looking for a place to start this new canola business, it was beneficial to start it where there was existing infrastructure in place," said Lahti.

Lahti added that there are certain pieces of equipment that are utilized in the ADL business that are also utilized in the canola processing scheme and that they are planning to put to work within the new facility.

The expansion of the facility is expected to be complete and commissioned by May of next year. In addition to alfalfa, Can Pro will be processing canola. They will be crushing seed and using the licensed new canola processing technology which fractionates canola meal into a series of higher value products.

The infractionation process is a home-grown canola technology invented at the University of Saskatchewan and commercialized by MCN to employ in Saskatchewan's most productive canola region.

"This new venture is a synergistic combination of existing infrastructure and new technology," said Lahti. "Our value-added processing model accesses multiple input crops, maximizes infrastructure utilization, injects proprietary technology, and produces a diversified product line for international feed and industry markets."

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"The canola meal is a low-value byproduct right now. MCN's patented infractionation process takes canola meal and fractionates it into multiple byproduct streams, creating products of much higher value than canola meal," explained Lahti.

"The canola meal has been an undervalued product for years with limited utilization. Therefore, fractionating the canola meal into other products opens up new markets for canola protein that previously could not be accessed. The new market suggests that more value is generated from the starting seed."

Can Pro has also attracted attention from biofuel manufacturers who have byproduct streams in need of further processing. The company's total seed utilization and multiple input materials approach to canola and alfalfa provide a model to enhance the economic viability of the biofuels industry.

"One of the problems with the biodiesel economic model is that they get little value from the meal. Our model extracts much greater value from the meal, which then allows better economics for the overall biodiesel manufacturer," Lahti suggested.

"Combined with unique local inputs, our model provides a risk-managed, sustainable, competitive advantage for our new company. If bio-refining is the wave of the future, this is an important step."

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REDUCING CATTLE FEEDING COSTS

With grain prices on the rise and margins shrinking for cattle producers, the time is right to look at the advantages of feeding lower grade grain such as light test weight barley.

Earlier this fall, cash prices for 1CW barley were as high as $167.12 per tonne, or $3.64 per bushel. Prices have dropped slightly and are currently about $153.00 per tonne, or $3.33 per bushel (in-store Saskatoon).

"With these higher prices for heavy feed barley, lighter test weight barley purchased at discounted prices may be an attractive option for cattle producers," said Saskatchewan Agriculture Livestock Development Specialist Bryan Doig.

This year, barley harvested in many locations across the province had lighter bushel test weights due primarily to dry conditions and high temperatures during the month of July.

"Many feedlots apply significant discounts for lighter barley and often refuse to purchase barley that is lighter than 42 pounds per bushel," said Doig.

Doig cites research done at the University of Alberta that compared the performance of feed steers fed finishing rations containing light test weight barley to rations with heavy barley.

"There were no differences in average daily gains or days to finish, comparing 34.5 pound, 47.3 pound, and 51.3 pound barley in finish feedlot rations," said Doig. "There were no differences in carcass weights, dressing percentage, rib-eye area or back fat depth between the three barley weights."

According to the Alberta study, steers gained an average of 3.6 to 3.7 pounds per day with a start weight of 867 pounds and a finish weight of 1162 pounds. It took 6.29 pounds of dry matter to get one pound of gain for the light barley, compared to 5.9 pounds of dry matter to get one pound of gain for the heavy barley.

"The dry-matter-to-gain ratio was six per cent higher for the light barley," Doig said. "The light barley contained more fibre and less starch than the heavy barley."

Doig notes that the main problem producers may encounter with light test weight barley is the variability in kernel size, because small kernels mixed with large kernels can make rolling the feed a challenge.

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"Barley should be milled or ground to increase its digestibility," he stated. "This usually increases the feed efficiency by 20 per cent or more. Breaking the barley into two or three pieces is all that's required to expose the starch."

These findings are important, since 2007 is looking like a record year for the prices of top grade grains of all varieties. As a result, the feed grain market will be under pressure over the next several months, and innovative approaches will be required to manage feeding costs, especially in a time of flattening cattle prices.

"Lighter test weight barley at discounted prices could help offset high feed grain prices, it's that simple," Doig said. "This may provide an opportunity for producers to reduce feeding costs for wintering cows, backgrounding, and finisher calves."

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FRUIT GROWERS GATHER IN SASKATOON

The 20th annual Saskatchewan Fruit Growers Association (SFGA) conference will be held during Crop Production Week in Saskatoon. The conference is set for January 11 and 12 at the Heritage Inn.

"The conference will reflect where the industry is going at this time," said Charon Blakley, Executive Director of the SFGA. "As the industry develops, growers are looking at marketing and branding as key elements."

The two-day agenda features numerous speakers, including Terry Ackerman, a business developer and brand builder with both a multinational corporate and co-operative background. Ackerman will be providing growers with insights on branding Saskatchewan fruit to set it apart and to gain recognition in the local, national and international markets.

Saskatchewan Agriculture will be presenting information on the history and future of the industry in Saskatchewan. The conference will be kicked off by Clarence Peters, who was Saskatchewan's Provincial Fruit Specialist for 27 years prior to his retirement, and will discuss how the industry has developed. Current Provincial Fruit Specialist Forrest Scharf will address the delegates during the opening night banquet.

There will also be plenty of opportunities for personal networking during the event.

"Sometimes, that is every bit as valuable as the sessions themselves," Blakley said. "We can learn from professional people, but we learn an awful lot just from networking with others who are doing the same thing as we are."

The agenda has been designed to deal with the interests and issues of everyone in the sector, according to Blakley.

"For people just starting out, with something like a u-pick operation, we have the raspberry and strawberry workshop," she said. "In crops like saskatoons, the most advanced sector for fruit, marketing both nationally and internationally is increasingly important."

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There will be two sessions on the potential for haskap, also known as honey-berry or blue honeysuckle, which is just beginning to develop as a commercial crop in Saskatchewan. The University of Saskatchewan's Eric LeFol and Bob Bors will present information on both crop development and the potential market for haskap exports to Japan.

The SFGA currently has about 160 members, and continues to develop new information and networking opportunities for members.

"That's one of the major advantages of being a member of the association. People like to hear how other growers are doing and how they are succeeding," said Blakley. "For instance, at this conference, we'll hear from Marie Bohnet of Cypress Hills Vineyard and Winery."

Complete information and registration forms are available on the SFGA website at www.saskfruit.com.

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ADF RESEARCH SHOWS BENEFIT OF SLOW RELEASE FERTILIZER

A recent study funded by Saskatchewan Agriculture's Agriculture Development Fund is proving the effectiveness of seed-row placed or "starter" fertilizer.

Jeff Schoenau, Senior Research Scientist and Saskatchewan Agriculture's Nutrient Management Chair, says the three-year study set out to find if there was any benefit from using a controlled release phosphorus fertilizer compared to conventional fertilizer.

"We wanted to see what impact the controlled release product had on phosphorus availability and tolerance of the crop compared to phosphorus fertilizer placed in the seed row. The second thing we looked at was potassium and the tolerance of different rates of seed-placed potassium, as well as a combination of phosphorus and potassium in the seed row," explained Schoenau.

Many growers use phosphorus and potassium as starter nutrients placed in the seed row or close by – but it is critical to understand what the tolerance levels are for both the nutrients and the nutrients-in-combination in different crops.

"Pretty well all fertilizers are salts, and one of the impacts is that too much fertilizer will hold back water from the germinating seed and seedling. That can manifest itself in delayed germination or inhibition of germination and emergence – what some people call fertilizer burn," said Schoenau.

The study was a follow-up to research that began in 2004, with the final experiments completed in 2006. The crops used in this latest study were: wheat, canola, peas, flax, canaryseed, mustard, chickpeas, pinto beans, alfalfa, bromegrass and oats.

Schoenau says the results were valuable.

"We found out some things about relative tolerance of different crops to fertilizer placed in the seed row," he noted. "Peas are certainly a sensitive crop to fertilizer placed in the seed row. The maximum allowable is fairly low for that crop, somewhere around 15 pounds [of P_2O_5] per acre as conventional monoammonium phosphate. Forage crops like alfalfa and bromegrass were also sensitive. Mustard, a crop that nobody had done much work on before, also tended to be a little bit more sensitive than canola."

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On the other side of the equation, the research showed that cereals like wheat and oats tended to be most tolerant of seed-placed rates, and all crops responded well to the use of a controlled release product.

"We found that, with the controlled release product, we could put much higher rates in the seed row without worrying about injury compared to the conventional monoammonium phosphate," Schoenau said. "So we established that as one of the benefits of a controlled release product."

Schoenau provides a bit of a caveat to the research.

"We did this work in the laboratory under controlled conditions, and things are always different out in the field," he noted. "But it certainly provides a bit of a baseline for relative damage potential among crops using different nutrients, as well as on the formulation of nutrients and how that may impact damage issues."

The results of the study will be used to update the recommendations in provincial fact sheets and published guidelines for nutrient and fertilizer management.

A copy of the ADF report, *Strategies for Improving the Efficiency and Crop Safety of Starter Fertilizer*, project number 20050725, can be obtained by phoning Saskatchewan Agriculture at (306) 787-5929, or downloaded from the Saskatchewan Agriculture website at www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca.

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